

VZCZCXR07103

PP RUEHAG RUEHBC RUEHDBU RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHLH RUEHPW RUEHROV
DE RUEHMD #0838/01 1270716
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 070716Z MAY 07
FM AMEMBASSY MADRID
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2438
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNISL/ISLAMIC COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHLA/AMCONSUL BARCELONA PRIORITY 2669

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MADRID 000838

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

EUR/FO FOR FARAH PANDITH
EUR/PGI FOR IVAN WEINSTEIN
EUR/PPD FOR ANNE BARBARO AND JEAN DUGGAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/30/2016

TAGS: KISL PREL PGOV SP
SUBJECT: MUSLIM INTEGRATION IN BARCELONA AND ANDALUCIA

REF: MADRID 482

MADRID 00000838 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Hugo Llorens, Deputy Chief of Mission, Reasons: 1.4 b & d

¶1. (U) Senior Advisor to A/S Fried, Farah Pandith, cleared this message.

¶2. (C) SUMMARY: On her second visit to Spain, Senior Advisor to A/S Fried for Muslim Engagement, Farah Pandith, traveled to Barcelona, the Andalucian cities of Cordoba and Sevilla and Madrid from April 19-24, meeting with representatives of the national and regional governments, Muslim communities and non-governmental organizations that work in the integration of new immigrants. These meetings underscored the diversity of the Muslim community, the challenges facing two distinct regions of Spain with large immigrant populations and the desire of both regional and national governments to demonstrate that they are taking the counterterrorism measures necessary to prevent radicalization and extremism. In the continuing evolution of our strategy for Muslim engagement, Post will use information gleaned from this visit to adjust our Mission Strategy for Muslim Engagement to sharpen its focus on promoting moderate Muslim voices and supporting Spanish efforts to develop its own Muslim identity. We will do this through the sharing of the US experience of embracing diversity and our history of successfully integrating immigrant populations. END SUMMARY.

//DIVERSITY OF THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY: DESPITE SIMILAR ISSUES, LITTLE COLLABORATION//

¶3. (U) Meetings with representatives of Muslim communities in Barcelona and Cordoba further highlighted the diversity found among Islamic groups as reported in reftel. In Barcelona, where Pandith met with the only Muslim elected to a regional parliament, Mohamed Chaib, as well as representatives from various NGOs and Muslim associations, including a breakfast with women leaders, the variety of countries represented was striking. Although the majority of Muslim in Spain come from Morocco, 40,000 Pakistani immigrants currently reside in Barcelona, nearly 80 percent of whom are male and in-country without wives or family.

¶4. (U) When asked about issues of primary concern to their communities, interlocutors in Barcelona spoke firstly of the need to construct a mosque worthy of the size of their population (some statistics cite the number of Muslims in Barcelona at more than 300,000). While Madrid has two large

mosques, Barcelona has none of note. The construction of a mosque is also seen as a means of allaying concerns regarding the proliferation of Muslim prayer centers by giving the community one central location to meet. In 2000, the city of Barcelona agreed to grant a plot of land for a mosque to be built and Saudi Arabia offered financing to move the project forward, but ground has yet to be selected. When asked what issue beyond the building of a mosque most concerned them, the lack of transparency as to what is being taught to young people by imams was cited, with the women, in particular, expressing concern regarding the lack of training received by Islamic religious leaders and the absence of Islamic religious instruction in Catalonia despite the 1992 national government decree mandating the offering of such classes whenever the request is received from 10 or more students at a school.

¶15. (U) In meeting with members of the Muslim community in Cordoba and representatives of NGOs who work in the integration of new immigrants, concern was raised over the rising number of unaccompanied minors entering Spain. The number of unaccompanied minors has risen dramatically since a change in the Spanish immigration law placed immigrant minors in a protected category under which they cannot be deported, but rather are placed in the custody of the regional government, which is responsible for their housing, education and general welfare. With its proximity to Northern Africa, the region of Andalucia faces a particular strain on its educational and social services resources.

¶16. (U) Meetings with Muslim groups in both Barcelona and Cordoba also underscored the lack of coordination among the growing number of Muslim associations which are created according to country of origin, with Spanish converts maintaining their own separate organizations. Access to funding from the national government for social integration, cultural and educational projects is tied to registration

MADRID 00000838 002.2 OF 002

with the Ministry of Justice and membership in one of the two national umbrella organizations that make up the Islamic Commission. However, additional funding is increasingly available at the regional level from the autonomous community governments. As a result, the two nationally recognized Islamic organizations, FEERI and UCIDE, have begun to focus on strengthening their local branches, supporting the mushrooming of regional associations. It is difficult to determine the extent to which these regional groups are representative of the local Muslim community.

¶17. (C) COMMENT: Little collaboration seems to exist between Moroccan, Pakistani and Saharan African communities. Should these Muslim communities decide to develop stronger ties with each other and develop a unified front, there could obtain significant political weight on issues of concern to them. It should also be noted that such groups as the Junta Islamica and the Muslim Association of Cordoba, which include a significant number of Spanish converts, have access to the media at both the national and regional levels that is disproportionate to their influence among Muslim populations in Spain. In general, there appears to be little collaboration between organizations of immigrant Muslims and Spanish converts. While Spanish converts could serve as bridges between the newly arrived Muslim immigrants and the larger Spanish population in developing a Spanish Muslim identity, they do not yet serve this role. END COMMENT.

//THE OFFICIAL RESPONSE: ALL IS UNDER CONTROL//

¶18. (U) Although significant powers have been devolved to the regional autonomous communities from the national government, this process has not been uniform. Catalonia, for example, has a regional police force, while Andalucia does not. Social welfare issues, such as the integration of new immigrants, however, are the responsibility of the regional government in both cases.

¶9. (C) In Barcelona, Pandith met with the Chief Inspector of the Catalan police force. In Sevilla, she met with the deputy to the national government's representative to the Andalucian government, who is responsible for police and security issues in the region. The interlocutors in both meetings firmly stated, that while ever vigilant to the possibility of Islamic radicalization, particularly with recent calls by Al-Qaida followers to recapture &Al-Andalus8, they felt that the required measures were being taken.

¶10. (C) Immigration officers in both cities also expressed satisfaction with the development of systems to ensure the efficient distribution of educational and health services to all residents, regardless of immigration status. Their efforts are concentrated on making immigrants aware of their rights and how to access the system. Once immigrants enter the system, the governments are confident in their ability to meet the needs of these communities. Immigration officials in Barcelona emphasized city planning as a means of integrating Muslim communities in a way that makes them more comfortable within the overall population and at the same time leaves the majority Catalan population more at ease with the new immigrants. The government of Andalucia has implemented a proactive public information campaign throughout the media and public schools to promote the benefits of diversity and respect for cultural differences.

¶11. (U) At the conclusion of her visit to Spain, Pandith briefed the DCM on the results of her visit and met with the Mission's Muslim Engagement Working Group to share the insights gathered from her travels to Barcelona and Andalucia. In the continuing refinement of its approach to Muslim engagement, Post will adjust its Mission Strategy to sharpen the focus on promoting moderate Muslim voices and supporting Spanish efforts to develop its own Muslim identity through the sharing of the US experience of embracing diversity and our history of successfully integrating immigrant populations.

Aguirre